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Features

Special articles, columns and features exclusive to the MDB.

INTERVIEW: When Samus Was Naked

1994, December 2009

This interview appeared in the official Japanese strategy guide to Super Metroid published by Nintendo. In this MDB exclusive, the entire interview was translated by CapCom from scans graciously provided from the private collection of VGMStudios. Reading this was like opening a treasure chest from the past. The Super Metroid development team reveals many astonishing insights into the series that have never before been available in English. Please sit back and enjoy. (To view the original scans, please visit the [Super Metroid Library page](#).)

The master ROM has been completed for about one month. The development staff who gave Samus life and created Planet Zebes tells us about Samus's true appearance...

NOBODY WANTED TO FUSS OVER A DIFFICULT DESIGN

Truly, thank you very much for your hard work. First, what makes you enthusiastic for Super Metroid and the Metroid series?

Sakamoto: I don't mean to say I was involved with the whole series. For the Game Boy version, the staff was a little different. However, everyone now in Nintendo R&D1* who has made part of Metroid is dedicated to the series' atmosphere and the style.

*Called Nintendo Development Department 1 in Japanese. In 2005, Satoru Iwata restructured Nintendo's R&D departments under Entertainment Analysis and Development.

Was the style* original?

Sakamoto: Well, we were obsessed with it not becoming too obsolete. Naturally, people always will call a series that before it is finished.

*The original term - kara "color" refers to the tone, manner, and overall feel of the game.

What specifically gives it this style you talked about?

Sakamoto: I think the music and graphics, and even the system itself, makes it different from other types of games. It's more complete than most action games, and above that it doesn't require RPG elements, like a puzzle in Zelda.

If it didn't resemble those kinds of games, was development difficult?

Sakamoto: Making it was fairly difficult. I think everyone wanted to avoid that kind of design.* However, I wanted to fuss over it.

*The original term, shisutemu or "system", refers to the game's overall design.

So this time you have a 24 Meg capacity?

Sakamoto: At first, we expected to use only half that capacity, but we put in some high quality music and graphics, so naturally, it expanded... No, we made it expand. (Laughs)

The programming workload and everything else must have also increased.

Sakamoto: Super Metroid was intended for both overseas and domestic audiences so required content that was completely the same. Because it's an involving story, the overseas and Japanese versions would be different; it required 12 Megs for making each one, so 24 Megabits of content makes for one dense game.

With this story, this time it's on the same planet - Zebes is the setting, isn't it?

Sakamoto: This time I wanted to complete the Metroid series. Also, I wanted to bring back an old enemy. A nemesis would be revived, and for the sake of portraying an image of this showdown with Samus, this time it could only happen on Planet Zebes. This is what I thought. The battle between Samus and Mother Brain would come to an end. I wanted to show what happens at the end of Metroid.

Was it intended that the player would be nostalgic for the same planet and terrain played on the Famicom Disk System version?

Sakamoto: Although that game was eight years ago, I wanted to please those who got to play the FDS version who would investigate it and say, "They have the items from here..." I thought that also seeing an enemy character and saying, "Ah, I know this guy!" would be an enjoyable reunion.

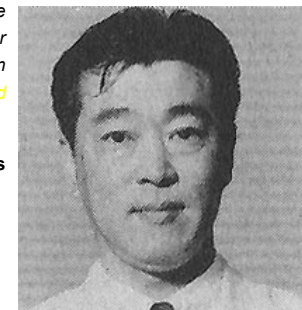
HIS WIFE WAS THE SHADOW DIRECTOR!?

Seems like it would have been difficult to coordinate the production of such a large map.

Secrets of Samus Only I Know:

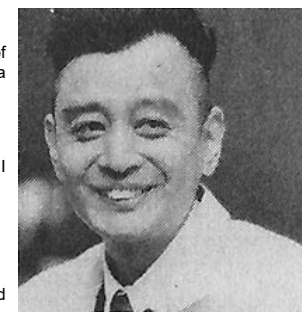
Super Metroid Staff Introduction

This is a profile of all the main staff members of Super Metroid. Names are listed family name first, in all caps.



KANO Makoto - Producer

Birthday: October 30, 1950
Hometown: Kyoto
Masterpieces: Metroid series, Super Scope, Mario and Wario
Duties and Content: Ensuring completion of project, overall coordination
Favorite Films and Music: Field of Dreams, Dances with Wolves, Oscar Peterson
Secret of Samus that only I know: You can defeat SR388's Metroid Queen by entering her mouth.
Clear Time: 4:38



SAKAMOTO Yoshio - Director

Birthday: July 23, 1959
Hometown: Nara Prefecture
Masterpieces: Metroid, Balloon Fight, X, For the Frog the Bell Tolls, Famicom Tantei Club
Duties and Content: Story creation, game balance management coordinator
Favorite Films and Music: The Last Emperor, Profondo Rosso (Sasperia 2), Die Hard, KIROUIN Hanako no shougai... (The Life of Kiroin Hanako)
Secret of Samus that only I know: I know where Samus's beauty mark is.
Clear Time: About 3 Hours

Sakamoto: We had a basis for judging the feeling of those who first played the game.

Osawa: We gradually became good at it.

Sakamoto: That's right, we couldn't get a proper judgment. Then, just before the game was complete, I brought it home and had my wife play it. That way, if there was any problem, I would see what direction to take. The next day, I would give directions for what I thought should be changed.

Osawa: I didn't know that! (Laughs) So Mr. Sakamoto's wife was behind the instructions to correct it!

Sakamoto: Well, I'm more that kind of guy. I also let my children play it.

So you were making adjustments up until the last moment.

Osawa: Everyone was keeping up spirits, and I was mostly like that.

Sakamoto: That's wise!

Osawa: We were tense, couldn't sleep, couldn't go home, and couldn't even take a bath. It stank! (Laughs) The work never ceased. The next day, we had to do it again.

Yamamoto: There weren't even eight **tatami mats** in the break room for the programmers and designers to sleep on.*

Mori: The break room really stank! (Laughs)

Osawa: What? Mori-san, everyone used deodorant. Hey, you must have been silently protesting! (Laughs)

Sakamoto: Clearly, people were happy to sleep even in the smelly break room.

*A room the size of eight tatami mats is 12ft x 12ft - and this room was smaller than that. It was a very tiny room for the entire team to use.



First Meeting! Director Sakamoto's Secret Storyboard 1

Must have been total carnage. How does this project compare with others?

Sakamoto: This time you can't really compare it. We didn't have anything for New Year's, and we don't release games until they're in the best condition possible. Until then I did my best to make it the best game it could be.

Did the map change a lot?

Sakamoto: Finally in about January*, we decided on the map, but up until that point we were killing parts that weren't working well.

Osawa: Hey, how many times did we do it? Run a meeting?** Was it about three times?

*Probably January 1994. The game was finished in February 1994, which is pretty amazing.

**Hashirouai, literally a 'running meeting'.

Running a meeting? What do you mean?

Osawa: Those in the staff not familiar with the game had to run through it from start to finish.

Sakamoto: It was kind of a debug. Everyone could see the game. That way, everyone could watch an unskilled player play it.

Osawa: We went too far! (Laughs) Or to put it another way, it was our reference for making changes.

Sakamoto: Because if it could teach us, why wouldn't we do it? If we compromise, two months of hell might become one month. I wanted to fix this problem, but maybe I didn't. I had to make the puzzles shallow so as not to hurt someone who didn't understand them.

About when did you start production?

Osawa: It was autumn about three years ago, right?* I think it took about a year and a half to finish the final version of the game.**

Sakamoto: Especially regarding content, I'll miss the sense of volume of the game. It's the only reason I'm still not happy with calling it an action game.

Osawa: If we changed just Samus' jump ability, the entire map would be ruined.

Sakamoto: You can't make something if you can't firmly decide on something basic.

*Autumn of 1991

**Super Metroid would have been finished in February 1994. This means full production began around August 1992, making preproduction about one year and production one and a half years.

THEY WERE INSPIRED BY THEIR FAVORITE MOVIES

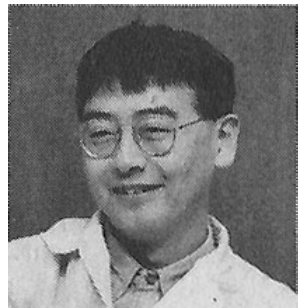
Incidentally, this time the opening cutscene, credits, etc. show considerable application of movie techniques.

Sakamoto: I like movies! That said, even though we didn't directly imitate movies, we did use heads and bodies from movie techniques. So this way we had a cool cutscene that we wanted to resemble a movie.



OSAWA Toru - Graphics

Birthdate: December 27, 1962
Hometown: Kyoto, Yamashina
Masterpieces: Kid Icarus, Famicom Tantei Club, For the Frog the Bell Tolls
Duties and Content: Small enemies, Kraid, Mother Brain, Map screen design. Samus screen design system.
Favorite Films and Music: Indiana Jones series, Daryl Hall & John Oates, Prince, SANO Motoharu
Secret of Samus that only I know: ---
Clear Time: 2:46



MATSUOKA Hirofumi - Graphics

Birthdate: June 25, 1961
Hometown: Hyogo Prefecture
Masterpieces: Metroid, Famicom Wars, Super Mario Land, Game Boy Wars, Mario Paint
Duties and Content: Background Production
Favorite Films and Music: I don't watch too many movies, and also especially music... I listen to FM radio in the car.
Secret of Samus that only I know: Samus isn't a woman. As a matter of fact, she's actually a shemale.
Clear Time: 3:30



YAMAMOTO Kenji - Sound

Birthdate: April 25, 1964
Hometown: Mie Prefecture, Ueno City
Masterpieces: Punch Out!!, Famicom Tantei Club II, Famicom Wars, Alleyway, Super Scope 6
Duties and Content: BGM Music and sound program, sound effect production
Favorite Films and Music: Youngblood (Emblem of Glory)
Secret of Samus that only I know: Spore Spawn's voice is me.
Clear Time: 3:39



First Meeting! Director Sakamoto's Secret Storyboard 2

Were Japanese subtitles a 'super' idea?

Sakamoto: That was during the development phase.

Osawa: At any rate, that made it look like a movie.

Sakamoto: It's funny, but Japanese players also say seeing the opening message in English is pretty cool. Something, when it's written in English, has a warm atmosphere.

Let's shift a little from talking about subtitles. There's something there when you said you wanted it to look like a movie; was that your goal?

Osawa: What's that?

Sakamoto: I was aiming for that! (Laughs) Really, I was just aiming for it.

I guess I'm talking about the image of Samus from films?

Sakamoto: Of course she's a bit like Ripley from Aliens (Sigourney Weaver), but a little more extravagant.

SAMUS DIED COMPLETELY NAKED



Director Mr. Sakamoto got his image of Samus Aran from actress Kim Bassinger.
From the film The Getaway (CIC Picture Video 8 Month Rental)
(c) 1994 Victory Company of Japan, Ltd. All rights reserved.

Which person is the image closest to; was there someone specific?

Sakamoto: Personally, I like Kim Bassinger from *9 1/2 Weeks* and *My Stepmother is an Alien*.

Osawa: Yeah, I see that. When Samus gets hit, her voice sounds like her.

What about when she dies?

Osawa: In the first phase of development, she was naked. You can see her naked for one frame. We put a bathing suit on her, but there was a subliminal effect for just an instant when you could see her naked for one frame.

Sakamoto: She was only naked for one second out of sixty minutes. However, when we stopped and thought about it for a moment, we had to stop because this sort of thing is terrible in America. (Laughs)

Osawa: It was dangerous, but Yamane* put clothes on her.

Yamamoto: We used the voice more carefully. When she dies, Hamano did the voice, but it sounded too sexual so we couldn't use it.

Hamano: When we sampled in front of the mic, I spoke a number of times. I wasn't any good and completely failed.

Yamamoto: I have to say it was a failure. (Laughs)

Sakamoto: I have a special version of the ROM with that in there. (Laughs)

Osawa: Anyway, she's naked and her voice is lewd. Furthermore, didn't Yamane make an ending where she's naked?

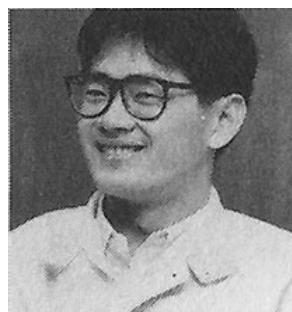
Yamane: That's a lie! (Laughs)

Osawa: Yamane had a tough workload this time around. There were about three people drawing the map background, but Yamane touched up all of what those three people drew.

Sakamoto: For Maridia and Brinstar, he was in charge of each area, and made various polishings. Each one had its own personality. Yamane retouched them to give each a unique feel. I think he was able to get this result.

Osawa: Of course, didn't he also unify the world by making it dirty?

*Some of the directors talk to their coworkers very familiarly, with just the last name, without the more formal "Mr." or "-san". By this point, the interviewees have begun to feel very informal.



KIMURA Hiroyuki - Graphics

Birthdate: June 1, 1965
Hometown: Ichikawa Prefecture
Masterpieces: Metroid
Duties and Content: Made Maridia's background
Favorite Films and Music: Zombie Secret of Samus that only I know: 106-60-90 [Samus's Measurements]
Clear Time: 2:30



MASHIMO Masahiko - Graphics

Birthdate: January 30, 1966
Hometown: Kyoto Prefecture
Masterpieces: F1 RACE (GB), For the Frog the Bell Tolls, Super Mario Land
Duties and Content: Made the backgrounds for Crateria, Norfair, and the Wrecked Ship; Crocomire's design, etc.
Favorite Films and Music: My favorite movies are dull. As for music, The Manhattan Transfer?
Secret of Samus that only I know: ?
Clear Time: About 4 hours?



YAMANE Tomoyoshi* - Graphics

Birthdate: January 2, 1968
Hometown: Yamaguchi Prefecture
Masterpieces: Game Boy Wars, Metroid, illustrator for For the Frog the Bell Tolls
Duties and Content: Samus character design, opening and ending, enemy characters, boss design, background retouching
Favorite Films and Music: Iron Man Gamma, Tony Takezaki's work
Secret of Samus that only I know: Nothing in particular.
Clear Time: About 2:40
*Listed in most game credits as Tomoyoshi, the kanji for his first name is "Tomomi". We have chosen to list his name here based on his credits preference.



The female staff drew SD Samus. In the realistic images of Samus, did she have a face like this?

FUJIKO FUJIO TRANSFORMS INTO HINO HIDESHI!?

Huh? Made it dirty?

Mashimo: Apparently, the characters I drew were fairly cute. Characters like Crocomire were so charming that when they were killed, the player would feel sad about them.

Osawa: He wanted to them to look like Fujiko Fumio's work! Then Yamane came into the picture.

Mashimo: When that happened, the characters became harsher so that the player could defeat them.

Osawa: Fujiko Fujio became Hino Hideshi* (Laughs)

Sakamoto: Like Mother Brain!

Osawa: At first, I drew her. Then, I made the character look like an old lady living in my apartment complex. (Laughs)

Mashimo: I wanted to see a shopping bag hanging from her hands.

Osawa: Then Yamane-sensei appeared.

Mashimo: After that, saliva dribbled down, she spit out foul breath, and she was filthy.

Sakamoto: Well it wasn't static as the rest was terrible, so we cut down on the amount of drool. Anyhow, in the final version, there was a moderate amount of drool. (Laughs)

*Fujiko Fujio was the two-person manga team behind Doraemon. **HINO Hideshi** is a famous horror manga artist.



First Meeting! Director Sakamoto's Secret Storyboard 3

There are many places we haven't seen before. What other secrets are there?

Osawa: You can beat Ridley when he appears in the Colony intro...

What!?

Sakamoto: You can do it if you shoot him a hundred times.

Yamamoto: Yes, and then the Metroid in the capsule will fall.

What else happens?

Osawa: It's fun and I like to do it.

Sakamoto: Well, if you save the Dachora and Etecoons in the end, then the ending will be a little different.

As I haven't seen this different ending, how has it changed?

Osawa: Please look carefully after you escape Zebes in your spaceship. I can't say any more.



Save the Etecoons in the end and... Note where the arrow is pointing.

In the ending credits, a foreign name comes on screen. Who is Dan Owsen?

Yamamoto: Aah! It's a harmless secret, but he is someone from NOA (Nintendo of America). He has come to Japan many times, and he talks with us. There's a voice in the opening. He's the person who did the voice.

Well, why didn't you use a voice actor?

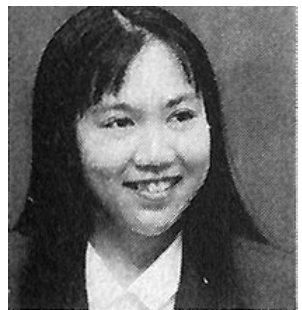
Yamamoto: Well. I'm just a **salaryman**! (Laughs)

A STORY TOLD WITHOUT WORDS

Where will the Metroid series go from here?

Sakamoto: I think the series is basically finished. Metroids were basically destined to be exterminated in the first place. So, I wanted to finish it in the most beautiful form.

So like that, it became the last one.



HAMANO Minako - Sound

Birthay: June 28, 1969
Hometown: Kyoto City
Masterpieces: Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening
Duties and Content: BGM composition
Favorite Films and Music: Le Grand Bleu (The Big Blue) was beautiful. I also wanted to see Bonobono.
Secret of Samus that only I know: Nothing different. (Also, Samus's voice...)
Clear Time: About 3:30 (Also about 98%)



IMAI Kenji - Programming

Birthay: May 27, 1959
Hometown: Kyoto
Masterpieces: Mario Paint, F1 RACE (GB)
Duties and Content: Created Kraid, Crocomire, map menu
Favorite Films and Music: *Ryuume ga Iku* (The Dragon Horse Comes), Simon and Garfunkle
Secret of Samus that only I know: Nothing in particular.
Clear Time: About 3 hours



MATSUMOTO Mitsuhiro - Programming

Birthay: October 10, 1968
Hometown: Kyoto Prefecture
Masterpieces: ---
Duties and Content: Event connections, Mother Brain
Favorite Films and Music: Terminator 2
Secret of Samus that only I know: I also want to know...
Clear Time: 3:30

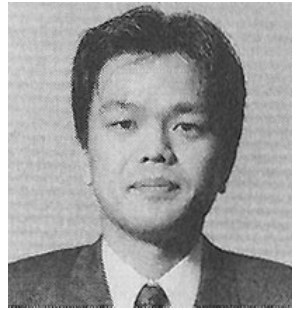
Sakamoto: It was kind of a gamble. From the beginning, it was decided that when the game begins, we wouldn't tell the whole story using text. The story had to be told in a minimal way. However, it wouldn't convey atmosphere. I thought the game's atmosphere was done completely through sound. I thought it would be good if we could do it like a silent movie. It means that inside Samus's helmet, she has a sober face. I wanted the player to think about that facial expression. Well, the culmination of that sort of thing was the final battle.

What will Samus do next?

Sakamoto: I can't clearly say right now, but I think I want to make her the main character in an action game.

That would be great. I know you are busy today, so thank you very much for your time.

Now their effort and ideas surpass a big epic Hollywood movie. They poured their passion for game development into it. Energy swells from the forefront of these 17 professionals... You can feel their determination from their pictures.



NAKAJIMA Kenji - Programming

Birthday: December 4, 1965

Hometown: ---

Masterpieces: Tennis (FC), Metroid, Sim City
Duties and Content: System coordination,
produced demo play

Favorite Films and Music: Back to the Future
1, 2, 3

Secret of Samus that only I know: There are a
good many frames in the animations of
Samus.

Clear Time: 2:32



FUJII Yasuhiko - Programming

Birthday: October 23, 1969

Hometown: Kyoto Prefecture

Masterpieces: For the Frog the Bell Tolls
Duties and Content: Main enemies
(minibosses), program

Favorite Films and Music: Jurassic Park
Secret of Samus that only I know: Samus has
no secrets. The enemies have a few secrets.

Clear Time: 2:40



MORI Yoshikazu - Programming

Birthday: January 3, 1970

Hometown: Shiga Prefecture

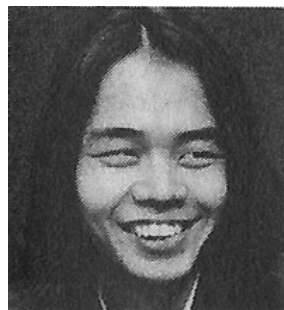
Masterpieces: Metroid 3

Duties and Content: Effects, enemy bodies,
various kinds of systems, background events,
debugging (interrupts), customizing.

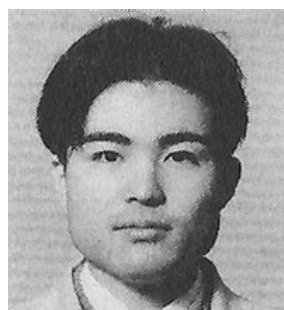
Favorite Films and Music: 2001: A Space
Odyssey, Blade Runner

Secret of Samus that only I know: Nothing in
particular.

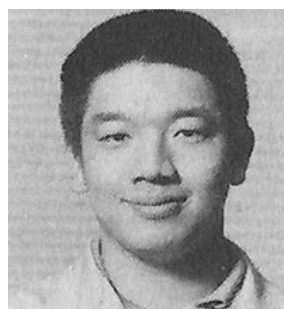
Clear Time: I've been busy and so haven't
cleared it.

**KUBOTA Isamu - Programming**

Birthday: January 23, 1971
Hometown: Tokushima Prefecture
Masterpieces: Super Metroid
Duties and Content: Programming for Samus, Phantoon, small enemies; title, opening, and ending demos
Favorite Films and Music: B'z, HIDEAKI Tokunaga
Secret of Samus that only I know: Samus's designer is Mr. Tomomi [YAMANE]. It is said that Samus is in her late 20s.
Clear Time: 2:24 (89%)

**ABE Kouichi - Programming**

Birthday: November 12, 1971
Hometown: Tokyo Metropolitan Area
Masterpieces: Space Banzooka
Duties and Content: Monster coordination/tweaking
Favorite Films and Music: Wings of Desire (Der Himmel über Berlin), Original Love
Secret of Samus that only I know: Nothing in particular.
Clear Time: 1:26 (7%)

**CHIKARAISHI Motomu - Programming**

Birthday: June 11, 1976
Hometown: Shiga Prefecture
Masterpieces: This is my first project.
Duties and Content: Enemy movement program, programmed map data
Favorite Films and Music: Record of Lodoss War, Sailor Moon
Secret of Samus that only I know: Nothing in particular.
Clear Time: 1:06 (7%)

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